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ON PAGE **A-1**

Even His Critics Acknowledge Casey Has Strengthened CIA

By L. EDGAR PRINA
Copley News Service

WASHINGTON — A year has passed since the Senate Intelligence Committee reported it could find no basis for concluding that William Joseph Casey Jr. was unfit to serve as director of Central Intelligence.

If that wasn't damning with faint praise it indicated that the committee had, as the Capitol Hill expression goes, only "a minimum of high regard" for him.

But if the committee were to make a judgment on Casey's job performance today, it almost certainly would be phrased in positive, favorable terms.

Even some of his severest critics, who personally don't like the gruff, sometimes abrasive New Yorker, acknowledge he has strengthened the CIA in his first 18 months as Lord of Langley.

"Despite the distrust of Casey, he is generally credited with doing a good job in beefing up the agency," an aide to one of the most critical senators said.

A strapping six-footer, the 69-year-old veteran of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in World War II, is on a roll. He is exhibiting the calm assurance of a man who loves his job



and feels he's on top of it.

Such was not the case when he was haled before the Senate committee to explain why he appointed the controversial and inexperienced Max C. Hugel as his deputy for clandestine operations and failed to provide all the information required of him on committee questionnaires.

Casey eventually conceded it was "a mistake" for which "I take full responsibility" to have appointed Hugel, who had by then resigned. And the director wound up telling the senators more about his own past business and government activities than they probably wanted to know.

Casey seems to be able to admit a mistake and learn from it. He agrees that he failed to devote sufficient attention to congressional relations after his confirmation sailed through the Senate 95 to 0 in January 1981.

He came across as a rather reluctant sharer of intelligence information with the oversight committees. Members of the Senate panel were particularly irked. Eventually, after

Hugel business erupted, several committee members, including then Chairman Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., suggested Casey should resign.

In recent months, however, Casey has made an effort to keep in closer touch. He now invites small groups of Senate and House committee members to discuss matters of mutual interest over breakfast.

Adm. Bobby R. Inman, who retired as CIA deputy director last month, called Casey a "good director," adding:

"The only critical note that I would make, and I've made it to Bill, is that he needs to work harder on his congressional relations. That process also could be helped if some members of Congress went a little easier in their public rhetoric toward him."

Casey gave himself a handicap with the news media when he decided that the CIA once again would be "not a low-profile, but a no-profile agency."

No longer can a reporter simply call the agency's public affairs office and arrange a briefing by one of the hundreds of specialists at the CIA complex in nearby Langley, Va., as was the case during the Carter administration.

Such briefings are now relatively rare and are offered on a quid pro quo basis. If the reporter is going to travel abroad and agrees to share his insights and information upon his return, he will probably find that a specialist is available.

Unclassified CIA research reports on such things as Soviet oil production or U.S.S.R. arms transfers to Third World countries no longer are brought to the attention of interested reporters, nor mailed to them upon request.

In an address to agency employees, Casey said he believes the CIA will be more effective and more respected "if we cut down on hawking our wares" and concentrate of excellence in intelligence work.

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